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# The Real Culprits in Security Foul-Ups

Intelligence officials are prowling the halls of Congress, trying to convince lawmakers that the laws governing intelligence activities should be tightened. Congressional access to this information, the spooks argue, must be strictly limited.

But the pathetic truth is that it's not loose-lipped members of Congress who are the worst violators of security. It's the intelligence agencies themselves. I've documented this in the past; now I have two examples that would be funny if they didn't involve serious security foul-ups.

The first case concerns the super-secret National Security Agency at Fort Meade, Md. Of all the nation's intelligence agencies, this is — or should be — the most sensitive. Its specialty is satellite spying and intercepting coded foreign communications.

To protect its secrets, the NSA had Marine guards posted throughout its headquarters building to keep employes from going into areas they didn't have clearance for. Then, in October 1978, the NSA brass adopted a nifty new system. It replaced the Marines with civilian guards and gave each security-cleared employe a battery-operated, electronically coded badge. This touched off an alarm if the employe wandered into an area not authorized by his or her clearance.

There was one awkward flaw in the super-duper badge system: If someone walked past a checkpoint with no badge at all, the alarm didn't go off. The security geniuses at NSA discovered this after a couple of months when a woman — fortunately not a Soviet spy — got lost looking for a bank office and wandered into the

agency's most sensitive area.

The second example involves the Central Intelligence Agency. About 15 years ago, sources told my associate Dale Van Atta, a technician with a mechanical knack discovered a weakness in the combination locks the agency used on its file cabinets here and abroad. Without any tools, he could open any file cabinet in five or 10 minutes.

The technician — again, fortunately, a patriotic American and not a potential traitor — devised a simple way of solving the problem. His suggestion was ignored.

Exasperated after several years of official shrugging, the employe finally made a challenge to the CIA. Stripped to his underwear and locked in a roomful of file cabinets, he would open them all. Taken up on his challenge, he proceeded to do precisely that.

Instead of congratulations or an award, the technician got nothing but grief from his bosses, who condemned him for meddling in affairs that were none of his business.

The CIA later adopted the employe's suggestion, but let it fall into disuse. As a result, "anyone with equal mechanical ability can discover how to open filing cabinets here and abroad, and any disaffected former employe can use this method against the agency," a CIA source said.